

AUTHORIZED EDITION.

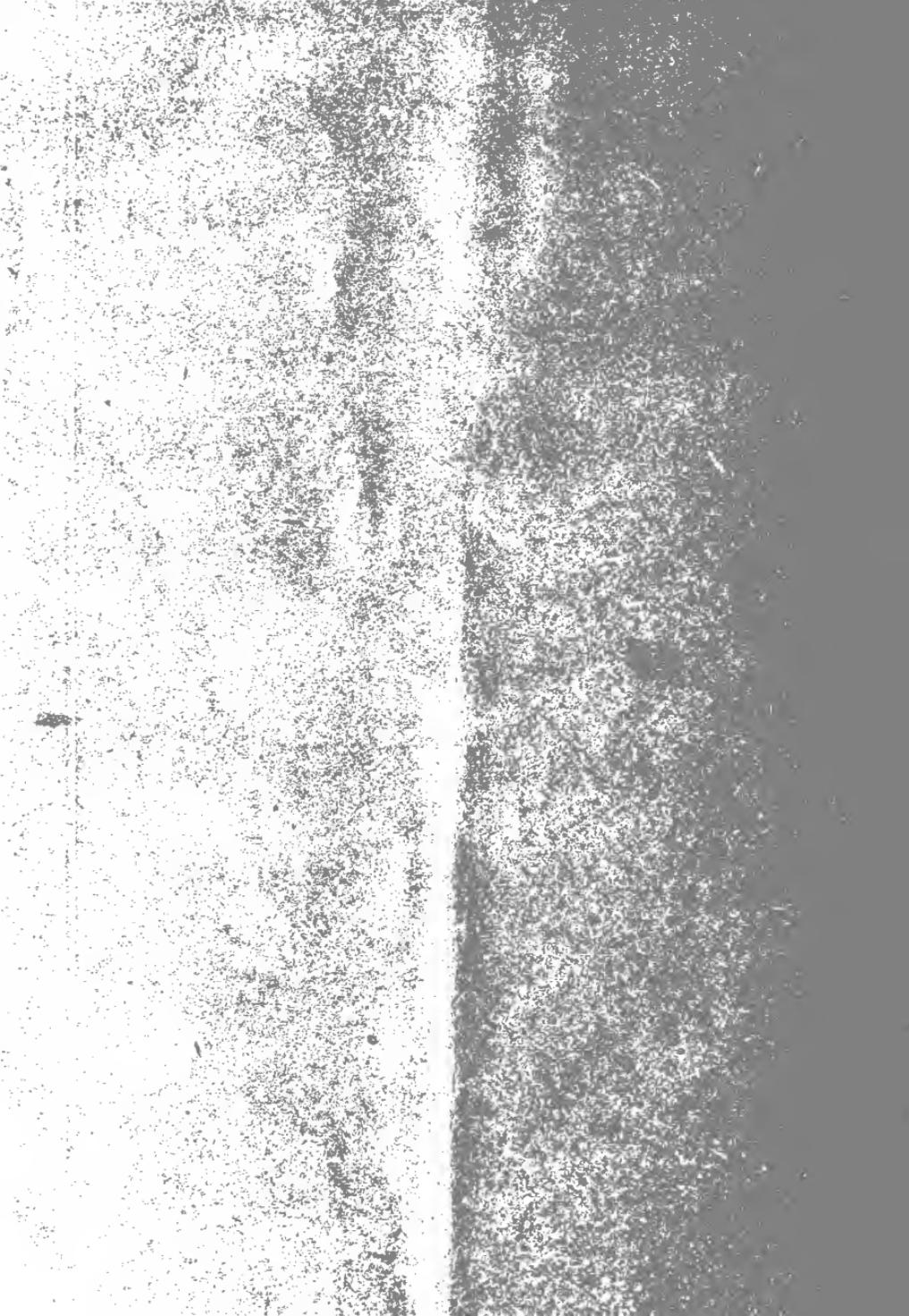
COL. R. G. INGERSOLL'S

LECTURE

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.



R. G. Ingersoll.



ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

Strange mingling of mirth and tears, of the tragic and grotesque, of cap and crown, of Socrates and Rabelais, of Aesop and Marcus Aurelius, of all that is gentle and just, humorous and honest, merciful, wise, laughable, lovable and divine, and all consecrated to the use of man; while through all, and over all, an overwhelming sense of obligation, of chivalric loyalty to truth, and upon all the shadow of the tragic end.

Nearly all the great historic characters are impossible monsters, disproportioned by flattery, or by calumny deformed. We know nothing of the peculiarities, or nothing but their peculiarities. About the roots of these oaks there clings none of the earth of humanity. Washington is now only a steel engraving. About the real man who lived and loved and hated and schemed, we know but little. The glass through which we look at him is of such high magnifying power that the features are exceedingly indistinct. Hundreds of people are now engaged in smoothing out the lines of Lincoln's face—forcing all features to the common mold—so that he may be known, not as he really was, but, according to their poor standard, as he should have been.

Lincoln was not a type. He stands alone—no ancestors, no fellows, and no successors. He had the advantage of living in a new country, of social equality, of personal freedom, of seeing in the horizon of his future the perpetual star of hope. He preserved his individuality and his self-respect. He knew and mingled with men of every kind; and after all, men are the best books. He became acquainted with the ambitions and hopes of the heart, the means used to accomplish ends, the springs of

action and the seeds of thought. He was familiar with nature, with actual things, with common facts. He loved and appreciated the poem of the year, the drama of the seasons.

In a new country a man must possess at least three virtues —honesty, courage and generosity. In cultivated society, cultivation is often more important than soil. A well-executed counterfeit passes more readily than a blurred genuine. It is necessary only to observe the unwritten laws of society—to be honest enough to keep out of prison, and generous enough to subscribe in public—where the subscription can be defended as an investment. In a new country, character is essential; in the old, reputation is sufficient. In the new, they find what a man really is: in the old, he generally passes for what he resembles. People separated only by distance are much nearer together than those divided by the walls of caste.

It is no advantage to live in a great city, where poverty degrades and failure brings despair. The fields are lovelier than paved streets, and the great forest than walls of brick. Oaks and elms are more poetic than steeples and chimneys. In the country is the idea of home. There you see the rising and setting sun: you become acquainted with the stars and clouds. The constellations are your friends. You hear the rain on the roof and listen to the rhythmic sighing of the winds. You are thrilled by the resurrection called spring, touched and saddened by autumn, the grace and poetry of death. Every field is a picture—a landscape; every landscape a poem; every flower a tender thought; and every forest a fairy land. In the country you preserve your identity—your personality. There you are an aggregation of atoms, but in the city you are only an atom of an aggregation.

Lincoln never finished his education. To the night of his death he was a pupil, a learner, an enquirer, a seeker after knowledge. You have no idea how many men are spoiled by what is called education. For the most part, colleges are places where pebbles are polished and diamonds are dimmed. If

Shakespeare had graduated at Oxford, he might have been a quibbling attorney or a hypocritical parson.

Lincoln was a many-sided man, acquainted with smiles and tears, complex in brain, single in heart, direct as light; and his word, candid as mirrors, gave the perfect image of his thought. He was never afraid to ask—never too dignified to admit that he did not know. No man had keener wit or kinder humor. He was not solemn. Solemnity is a mask worn by ignorance and hypocrisy—it is the preface, prologue, and index to the cunning or the stupid. He was natural in his life and thought—master of the story-teller's art, in illustration apt, in application perfect, liberal in speech, shocking pharisees and prudes, using any word that wit could disinfect.

He was a logician. Logic is the necessary product of intelligence and sincerity. It can not be learned. It is the child of a clear head and a good heart. He was candid, and with candor often deceived the deceitful. He had intellect without arrogance, genius without pride, and religion without cant—that is to say, without bigotry and without deceit.

He was an orator—clear, sincere, natural. He did not pretend. He did not say what he thought others thought, but what he thought. If you wish to be sublime you must be natural—you must keep close to the grass. You must sit by the fireside of the heart; above the clouds it is too cold. You must be simple in your speech; too much polish suggests insincerity. The great orator idealizes the real, transfigures the common, makes even the inanimate throb and thrill, fills the gallery of the imagination with statues and pictures perfect in form and color, brings to light the gold hoarded by memory—the miser shows the glittering coin to the spendthrift hope—enriches the brain, ennobles the heart, and quickens the conscience. Between his lips words bud and blossom.

If you wish to know the difference between an orator and an elocutionist—between what is felt and what is said—between what the heart and brain can do together, and what the brain can

do alone—read Lincoln's wondrous words at Gettysburg, and then the speech of Edward Everett. The oration of Lincoln will never be forgotten. It will live until languages are dead and lips are dust. The speech of Everett will never be read. The elocutionist believes in the virtue of voice, by sublimity of syntax, the majesty of long sentences, and the genius of gesture. The orator loves the real, the simple, the natural. He places the thought above all. He knows that the greatest ideas should be expressed in the shortest words—that the greatest statues need the least drapery.

Lincoln was an immense personality—firm but not obstinate. Obstinacy is egotism—firmness, heroism. He influenced others without effort, unconsciously; and they submitted to him as men submit to nature, unconsciously. He was severe with himself, and for that reason lenient with others. He appeared to apologize for being kinder than his fellows. He did merciful things as stealthily as others committed crimes. Almost ashamed of tenderness, he said and did the noblest words and deeds with that charming confusion—that awkwardness—that is the perfect grace of modesty. As a noble man, wishing to pay a small debt to a poor neighbor, reluctantly offers a \$100 bill and asks for change, fearing that he may be suspected either of making a display of wealth or a pretense of payment, so Lincoln hesitated to show his wealth of goodness, even to the best he knew.

A great man stooping, not wishing to make his fellows feel that they were small or mean.

He knew others, because perfectly acquainted with himself. He cared nothing for place, but everything for principle; nothing for money, but everything for independence. Where no principle was involved, easily swayed—willing to go slowly if in the right direction—sometimes willing to stop, but he would not go back, and he would not go wrong. He was willing to wait. He knew that the event was not waiting, and that fate was not the fool of chance. He knew that slavery had defenders, but no defense, and that they who attack the right must wound them-

selves. He was neither tyrant nor slave. He never knelt nor scorned. With him, men were neither great nor small—they were right or wrong. Through manners, clothes, titles, rags and race he saw the real—that which is. Beyond accident, policy, compromise and war, he saw the end. He was patient as destiny, whose undecipherable hieroglyphics were so deeply graven on his sad and tragic face.

Nothing discloses real character like the use of power. It is easy for the weak to be gentle. Most people can bear adversity. But if you wish to know what a man really is, give him power. This is the supreme test. It is the glory of Lincoln, that almost absolute power, he never abused it, except upon the side of mercy.

Wealth could not purchase, power could not awe, this divine, this loving man. He knew no fear except fear of doing wrong. Hating slavery, pitying the master—seeking to conquer, not persons but prejudices—he was the embodiment of the self-denial, the courage, the hope, the nobility of the nation. He spoke, not to inflame, not to upbraid, but to convince. He raised his hands, not to strike, but in benediction. He longed to pardon. He loved to see the pearls of joy on the cheeks of a wife whose husband he had rescued from death.

Lincoln was the grandest figure of the fiercest civil war. He is the gentlest memory of our world.

INGERSOLL ON GARFIELD.

Abraham Lincoln, the greatest man that was ever President of the United States. As soon as he was elected the South said: "We will not stay in the Union." The South said: "You have no right to elect a man opposed to the extension of human slavery," and James Buchanan said that they had a right to go out of the Union; and there was another little man who said, "I say so, too," and his name was Samuel J. Tilden. He read the Constitution of the United States and several Democratic platforms, and decided that the Government had no right to do anything except to defend slavery. Recollect that James Buchanan was an old bachelor not only, but a Democrat. Recollect that, and say to yourselves, "Why should we ever trust a man or elect him President of the United States, who prefers the embraces of the Democratic party to the salvation of the country?" Now, in view of this fact, I want every man to swear that he will never vote for an old bachelor again. The democrat claimed that this was not a nation. It was simply a confederacy, and that the old banner of the stars represented a contract commencing with, "Know all men by these presents, that this don't represent a great and glorious and sublime people, but it represents a confederacy." That was the doctrine of the Democratic party South. It was the doctrine of the Democratic party North. It is still the doctrine of the Democratic party North and South. The Democratic party in the South collected themselves together for the purpose of breaking up this Union. The Republican party said to them, "You try and break up this Union and we will break your necks," and they did it. The Republican party came into power on the heels of the Buchanan administration. The treasury was empty of coin as the Democratic party was of patriotism and honor. We had to borrow money of whom we could,

On the other hand, we have a man who is a trained statesman, who has discussed those questions time and time again, and whose opinions are well known to all the intelligent people of this Union. He was as good a soldier as Hancock was. (A voice, "A volunteer," and applause.) The man who makes up his mind in time of profound peace to make war the business of his life; the man who is adopted by the Government; the man who makes war his profession is, in my judgment, no better than the man who in times of peace would rather follow the avocations of peace, and who, when war comes, when the blast of conflict blows in his ears, buckles on his sword and fights for his native land, and, when the war is over, goes back to the avocations of peace. (Applause.) I say that Garfield was as good a soldier as Hancock, and I say that Garfield took away from the field of Chickamauga as much honor as one man can carry. (Applause.) He is a trained statesman. He knows what he is talking about and he talks about it well. I have known him for years. I know him as well as I know any other man, and I tell you that he has more brains, more education, wider and more splendid views than any other man who has been nominated for the presidency since I was born. (Applause.)

Some people say to me: "How can you vote for Garfield when he is a Christian and a preacher?" I tell them I have two reasons; one is, I am not a bigot, and the other is, General Garfield is not a bigot. He does not agree with me; I do not agree with him on thousands of things; but on the great luminous principle that every man must give to every other man every right that he claims for himself we do absolutely agree.

General Garfield is an honest man every way; intellectual every way. He is a poor man; he is rich in honor, in integrity he is wealthy, and in brains he is a millionaire. (Laughter and applause.) I know him, and if the people of Illinois knew him as well as I do, he would not lose one hundred votes in this State. He is a great, good, broad, kind, tender man, and he will do, if elected President, what he believes to be right. (Applause.) I

like him, too, because he is a certificate of the splendid form of our Government. I like him because, under our institutions, he came from abject poverty to occupy the position he now does before the American people. He will make Hope the tailor of every ragged boy. He will make every boy think it possible, no matter how poor he is, no matter how hungry he may be, he will make every one of those boys believe that there is in their horizon some one beckoning them to glory and to honor. (Applause.) That is the reason I like this country, because everybody has a chance. I like it because the poorest man can live hoping his boy may occupy the highest place. That is the reason I like this country. That is one of the reasons I want to see General Garfield elected. He believes in honor; he believes in liberty; he believes in an honest ballot; he believes in collecting the revenues; he believes in good money; he believes in a Government of law; he believes that this is absolutely a Nation, and not a Confederacy, and I believe in him. (Applause.) Throwing aside, throwing to the winds, all prejudice, all partisanship, all hatreds, I beg of every one who hears me to conscientiously decide for himself what, under the circumstances, as a man, as a patriot, as a lover of justice, he ought to do. That is all I want you to do. Be honor bright. (Laughter.) Do not be led away by the appeals of gentlemen who once belonged to the Republican party. Vote to sustain the greatest possible cause, human liberty. I know and appreciate what our liberty has cost. We are reaping to-day the benefits of the sufferings of every hero who ever died. We are to-day a great, a united, and a splendid people, simply because somebody was great and good enough to die that we might live. Now, do you believe if the dead could rise from their graves—the men fallen on all the battle-fields of the war—could they rise from the unknown graves that make this continent sacred, how would they vote next November? Think of it. Let us be true to the memory of every man that ever died for us. (Applause.)

